

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

Remarks at Graham Road Elementary School in Falls Church, Virginia
January 19, 2010

Hello, everybody. You guys look really cute in those chairs. [*Laughter*]

I am pleased to be joined today by my outstanding Education Secretary, Arne Duncan, at Graham Road Elementary School, one of Virginia's finest schools. And here at Graham Road, they're using innovative approaches to provide effective teaching to all their students, and that's something that all of America's schools have to do.

As I said before, there are any number of actions we can take as a nation to enhance our competitiveness and secure a better future for our people, but few of them will make as much of a difference as improving the way we educate our sons and daughters. Offering our children an outstanding education is one of our most fundamental—perhaps our most fundamental—obligation as a country. And whether we meet that obligation not only reflects who we are as Americans, it will shape our future as a nation. Countries that outeducate us today will outcompete us tomorrow, and I refuse to let that happen on my watch.

Now, it's clear that doing the same old things will not get the job done for our kids, or for America, or for our future. So when I took office, I asked Arne Duncan to work with States and local school districts to take on business as usual in our education system, and that's how the Race to the Top competition was born last July. It's a national competition among States to improve our schools.

Over the past few months, we've seen such a positive response that today I'm announcing our intention to make a major new investment, more than \$1.3 billion in this year's budget to continue the Race to the Top. And this support will not only reaffirm our commitment to States engaged in serious reform, it will also expand the Race to the Top competition to include local school districts that are also committed to change, so innovative districts like the one in Texas whose reform efforts are being stymied by State decisionmakers will soon have the chance to earn funding to help them pursue those reforms.

After months of planning and preparation, the first round of Race to the Top applications is coming due today. And it's a sign of how much States and schools believe this initiative would benefit them that we're expecting significantly more States to apply than will actually receive a grant.

And here's how Race to the Top works. Last year, we set aside more than \$4 billion to improve our schools, one of the largest investments in reform in our Nation's history. But we didn't just hand this money out to States that wanted it; we challenged them to compete for it. And it's the competitive nature of this initiative that we believe helps make it so effective. We laid out a few key criteria and said if you meet these tests, we'll reward you by helping you reform your schools.

First, we encouraged States to adopt more challenging standards that will actually prepare our kids for college and their careers. We also encouraged schools to adopt better assessments, not just one-size-fits-all approaches, to measure what our kids know and what they're able to do.

Second, we urged schools and school districts to make sure we have excellent principals leading our schools and great teachers leading our classes by promoting rigorous plans to develop and evaluate teachers and principals and by rewarding their success.

Third, we urged States to use cutting-edge data systems to track a child's progress throughout their academic career and to link that child's progress to their teachers so we know what's working and what's not working in the classroom.

Fourth, we encouraged States to show a stronger commitment to turning around some of their lowest performing schools.

And even before States have received a single dime of taxpayer money, many of them have committed to instituting important reforms to better position themselves for a Race to the Top grant. Forty-eight States have now joined a nationwide partnership to develop a common set of rigorous, career-ready standards in reading and math. Wisconsin has enacted legislation permitting schools to link student achievement to the performance of teachers and principals. In Illinois, Louisiana, Tennessee, California, we've seen changes in laws or policies to let public charter schools expand and succeed. These are public schools with more independence that are formed by teachers, parents, and community members.

So by rewarding some of these States submitting applications today, by extending the Race to the Top for States, by launching a Race to the Top among school districts, and by applying the principles of Race to the Top to other Federal programs, we'll build on this success. We're going to raise the bar for all our students and take bigger steps towards closing the achievement gap that denies so many students, especially black and Latino students, a fair shot at their dreams.

We'll open up opportunity, evenly and equitably, across our education system. We'll develop a culture of innovation and excellence in our public schools. And we'll reward success and replicate it across the country. These are some of the principles that drive Race to the Top. These are some of the principles that will drive my forthcoming budget.

And these steps won't transform our education system overnight; not every school is going to be a Graham immediately. But they will help put us on a path to raise the quality of American education, to prepare our children to succeed in their lives and in their careers, and to secure America's success in the 21st century. That's a goal my administration will be focused on achieving in the months and years to come.

Thanks very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:25 a.m.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Graham Road Elementary School in Falls Church, VA.

Locations: Falls Church, VA.

Names: Duncan, Arne.

Subjects: Education : Charter schools; Education : Global competitiveness; Education : Standards and school accountability; Education : Teachers; Education, Department of : Race to the Top Fund; Education, Department of : Secretary; Virginia : Graham Road Elementary School in Falls Church; Virginia : President's visits.

DCPD Number: DCPD201000036.